

1. INTRODUCTION



Open Channel Co-Operative Limited. Australia's largest community based video organisation, Open Channel provides equipment and facilities for hire and provides advice, information and training in all aspects of video production. The Co-operative also produces a wide range of programs for individuals and community organisations, including television dramas and documentaries. Open Channel has over 200 members and is supported by the Australian Film Commission.

INTRODUCTION

Co-operatives in Victoria developed from community initiative, not as a result of any government policy. Their growth came in response to community needs, adopting proven practices from overseas in democratic, equitable operations of mutual benefit. They set out to improve their own and their communities' situation, to reach goals which could not be achieved satisfactorily by their separate, individual efforts.

Today, co-operatives are reaching into every sector of the economy. Including the co-operative housing societies, the co-operative companies and the industrial and provident societies, there were in Victoria in June, 1985, 2,714 co-operatives with a total membership of 736,400 and combined assets of \$2,198.2 million.

New applications of co-operative practices are emerging—food, worker and rental housing—which have attracted government support, and based on overseas experience, hold great potential. Government facilitation is needed if Victoria's co-operative movement is to provide an across the board alternative to traditional public and private enterprise organisations.

MACC's consultation with the co-operative movement highlighted a number of problem areas:

- (a) legislation which failed to protect the distinctive identity of co-operatives;
- (b) the underdeveloped state of co-operative education and training;
- (c) difficulties in obtaining finance;
- (d) uneven levels of development between co-operative sectors;
- (e) the fragmented nature of Victoria's co-operative movement.

It is to be hoped that this report addresses these problem areas, opening up new opportunities for all co-operative sectors, whether new or old.

Ministerial Advisory Committee on Co-operation

In 1984, the Honourable Ian Cathie, then Minister for Housing and Minister administering the Co-operation Act, established the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Co-operation (MACC).

The Committee was to consult widely with the co-operative movement and report its findings.

Terms of reference

The basic terms of reference were generally to advise on:

- Policy matters relating to the drafting of new co-operative legislation; and
- Policy development relating to the co-operative movement generally.

MACC actions to date

An Information Paper, "The Development of the Co-operative Movement in Victoria" was published and distributed in June 1984.

A seminar addressing the same theme was held at the Exhibition Building, Melbourne on June 23, 1984 with over five hundred people in attendance.

Members of MACC and officers of the Registry studied the co-operative movement in several other countries and Australian States.

At an early stage in its deliberations MACC concluded that the state of co-operative education and training should be assessed and potential new directions identified. To this end it commissioned a research project which has resulted in a report, "Democracy Through Education". Copies of the report are deposited in municipal libraries and at TAFE and CAE Colleges (ISBN 0 7241 51087).

To promote community involvement in the co-operative review MACC established a number of consultative working parties. In July, 1985 MACC published a volume of working papers titled "Co-operation in Victoria, MACC Working Papers", setting out some views of the movement in critical areas (ISBN 0 7241 5124 9). A summary of these views is included as Appendix A to this report.

Provision was made for each working party to formally present its report to MACC and to highlight and discuss particular areas of concern.

The report was considered by Cabinet in June 1986 and is to be released for public comment until Monday, November 10th.

Responses to this report

Submission should be made in writing to:

MACC Report,
Registry of Co-operatives,
Myer House,
250 Elizabeth St.,
MELBOURNE 3000